

A GLANCE AT THE INTERIOR OF THE CHURCHES IN THE DEANERY OF SPARKHAM, IN NORFOLK.—NO. VII.

WITH NOTICES OF THEIR ACTUAL CONDITION.

(Continued from p. 544.)

Billingford.—We are always gratified on meeting with indications that the parochial clergyman holds it not enough, in respect of the wants of the fabric in which he is called to minister, merely to

"Talk with churchwardens about pews;"

but both by precept and example promotes, as far as in him lies, the stability of its general condition, and the decency and order of its arrangements. Such indications are by no means wanting in the fine church of Billingford; which in Parkin's time seems to have been in a very dilapidated state throughout.

We should like to know the orientation of this church, that is, the precise degree of its inclination towards the east: the pile was probably dedicated to either St. Mary the Virgin or the Holy Trinity, and the exact position would furnish us with an inference in favour of one or other of these; for our ancestors "used to make the church point to that part of the horizon in which the sun rose on the day of its foundation, the day also, it should be remembered, of the patron saint."

It consists of a nave with clerestory pierced on each side by three windows, formed of quatrefoils inserted in circular mouldings; two aisles, a spacious chancel, and an octagonal tower with one bell only. The ancient covering of lead over the nave and aisles has yielded place to pantiles; the chancel is flat-tiled. Cause for regret exists in that, at the period of the reparations, it was not yet received as a dictum that "flat ceilings are inconsistent with Gothic architecture," and that, "next to a stone vaulted roof, none has so good an effect internally as an open roof exhibiting the timbers." This is peculiarly obvious in the coved ceiling of the chancel here, rapid in itself, and, far worse than that, rendering all but impossible the restoration of its once splendid east windows. Some of these, particularly one now blocked at the east end of the north aisle, are fine examples of the Perpendicular period; but that of the majority is geometrical tracery, approaching the Decorated. Shall we be excused in entering our protest against the "washings" to which the stone-work of these externally has been subjected? The lime-brush has done too much to impair the interior beauties of our churches—witness here the many-clustered pillars, with their finely-moulded capitals, and having the bases set on stilted polygonal plinths,—that its scope should be yet enlarged. Besides, we object to it on principle, as being an "irreverent" substitute for the mason's chisel.

This spacious and lightsome edifice is entered from a mean porch by crossing an ancient grave-stone, long ago "creased" of its little commemorative brass. The floor here and in the central avenue, nearly co-extensive with the nave, is laid diagonally with pavements; those of the chancel, which mount in three platforms to the altar-rail, intersect at right angles with the building; the first step, set under a pointed chancel-arch—the place of the lost rood-screen—has its moulded nosing, and the riser under, wrought in Caen stone. The floor under the seats—for the most part open, but of debased character, and having the standards created by very rude *fleurs de lis*—is by no means in similarly good condition.

The font, which has been advanced from its former position in front of the tower archway more into the body of the nave, and there elevated on a high octagonal plinth, represents two distinct styles. The lower portion, a cylindrical stem set on a hexagonal base, and surrounded by four small round shafts, bespeaks the Norman period; while a capacious bowl of octangular form externally, where the compartments are paneled with double arches, and the spandrels supplied with quatrefoils, should denote a later era. The lining—it appears to have been once leaded—is gone; and the drain no longer serviceable, a point we should hope of undesigned omission at the time of removal.

In the chancel, the canopy of the sedilia, if they had a canopy, has disappeared: a pointed arch enriched with crockets surmounts the piscina, the orifice of which is foliated. The space within the altar-rails is "wainscoted"

by a low brick wall faced with cement, and built so as to admit a current of air at the back. The rail and table of varnished oak are, with some reserve on the style of the balusters, unexceptionable. A north door, communicating with the grave-yard, almost demands the erection of a sacristy. Between it and the chancel a curious perforation, in the form of a square-headed window, crossed by a transom below the centre, is thought to have formed the confessional of the Papal requisition; it is now partly blocked. The steps from the rood-loft seem to have had their *débouchement* in the south aisle. The holy table appears at present without a dossal or screen over it, but we were informed that the decalogue engraven on zinc is in course of preparation, and will be set up there in obedience to the eighty-second canon.

We must not leave the chancel without noticing the zeal for its good and sufficient reparation—as well as that of the edifice generally—shown by the present incumbent. *Transit in exemplum?* Good it were if some who love to declaim against "superstitious filthiness at diriges, at month's minds, at treotalls, in abbeyes and chantries," would confess that the real filthiness of the churches in which themselves minister is indeed most foul and lamentable to behold.

At an inquisition taken anno 34 Henry III., the jury find that Richard de Bec had no right to fish, except for eels, in the sluices of the two mills here; and the present worthy occupant of Bec Hall may aver that we also are devoid of right to impugn his large seat in the north aisle. Parkin mentions "the remains of a large and handsome pew of oak, with a cover," as appertaining to the Hall in his time. Those which now disfigure the east end of this fine church have few claims to notice on the score of beauty; but they at least possess one merit—that of not being immoderately high. The finials of the ancient benches exhibited, it seems, in rude carving the armorial bearings of Curson and others. Full-length figures of the saints in fresco once adorned the walls; one of them discernible at no remote period over the north door might represent St. Christopher.

The panels of the reading-desk and pulpit contain portions of tracery, like that of the rood-screen at Weston: the former will be so far altered, we hear, that the minister may face southward. A lectern should by all means be introduced here, and two chancel stalls placed near it; one on each side, would have fine effect.

The tower, as already observed, is in form octangular: it has four perpendicular windows in the belfry stage, and a fine west window of similar design affords light into the nave beneath. The parapet is embattled, and the outline of its lower portions, by the introduction of massive buttresses continued within, relieved by the deep "responds" of the western piers. The set-offs of the buttresses at the chancel-end are curious.

The site may be dismissed in a few words—

"A gentle hillock crown'd
With a peculiar diadem!"

and we were pleased to learn that its natural beauties will be enhanced by a judicious clumping of appropriate trees. Why should not there be a wish, yea a very earnest desire, for embellishing those places where "the field of God is sown with the seeds of the resurrection?"

RIVER DON IMPROVEMENTS.—On Thursday week, a deputation from the River Don Company met the committee of Town Council at the Mansion-house. The deputation stated the views of the company with regard to the improvements in the navigation. They proposed to make a still-water navigation of nine feet up to Doncaster with only one lock between the tide way, and to form a flood-drain extending from the Doncaster Mill as far as below Sandall weir, of dimensions capable of containing the whole of the flood waters. They also contemplate the embanking of Newton Ings and Crimpsall, in order to prevent the floods from coming into Marsh-gate. It is also a matter of impossibility to estimate these improvements too highly, because the prosperity of the town is intimately connected with the more efficient navigation of the river itself.—*Doncaster Gazette.*

BATHS AND WASHHOUSES FOR THE LABOURING CLASSES.

THE meeting which recently took place at the Mansion-house, and the interest it has excited, not only in London but throughout the country, may be taken as evidence of the impression made by the sanitary report and the other confirmatory inquiries as to the physical condition of the labouring population, and of the increasing anxiety they have created in the minds of persons of all parties to do all that may be done immediately, and in the order of practicability by voluntary effort, without waiting for those larger measures which can only be achieved by well-directed legislation. Undoubtedly, the erection of a cheaper and superior description of public baths and accommodation on a large scale, which shall remove the business of washing from the single room in which the whole of a poor man's family are born, work, live, sleep, and die, will be legitimate objects of voluntary exertion. Open thoroughfares, free ventilation, and good drainage are imperatively necessary for the preservation of the public health. It has been shewn, though the proof was unnecessary, that mortality is greatly increased by the squalid, ill-lighted, ill-ventilated dwellings of the poorer classes. Such dwellings are the nurseries of typhus, which propagates itself into the neighbourhoods where wealth, relying on superior arrangements, deems itself secure. Dr. Farr states that the health or unhealthiness of various districts is indicated uniformly by the ventilation and drainage of dwellings.

A profuse supply of water to the dwellings of the humbler classes is essential to public health. All vermin loathe a well-washed floor. Medical men have often told us that they consider cleanliness more fattening and more contributive to a healthy frame than a large supply of good food. We see the principle exhibited in the grooming of horses, washing of dogs, &c.

Already several thousand pounds have been subscribed, though the committee has scarcely yet entered upon their duties.

MEMORIAL TO THE LATE EARL OF LONSDALE.—At a meeting of the Westmoreland magistrates on Saturday last, the subject of the erection of a suitable memorial to the late Earl of Lonsdale was introduced by Mr. Wilson, of Casterton Hall, who advocated the establishment of an institution for the benefit of the most unfortunate of all sufferers, those who are deprived of their reason, and stated that the erection and endowment of such an asylum had frequently occupied the benevolent mind of his lordship. An example of distinguished munificence has already been set by the gentlemen in the neighbourhood of Kendal. James Gandy, Esq., of Heaves Lodge, and John Wakefield, Esq., of Sedgwick, each having declared his intention to subscribe the sum of 500*l.* towards the undertaking. A lady, whose name has not at present transpired, has contributed 100*l.* towards the same object.—*Westmoreland Gazette.*

NEW METHOD OF BURNING TILES AND BRICKS.—Mr. Hodges, at the meeting of the Staplehurst Agricultural Association, said, that before long, great facility would be afforded for the draining of land, by a contrivance which would shortly be made public. There were several machines for making draining tiles, but the burning them and other expenses would always prove a great obstacle to their general use. This having occurred to him, he had, with the assistance of an ingenious man in his own employment, found out a mode by which any farmer who lived too far from a kiln could burn his own tiles, at a very trifling expense. The kiln would not cost more than 5*l.*, and it made inch-tiles complete at the rate of 18,000 in a fortnight. It would not be necessary to have any permanent building, and when a farmer had done with it, he could dispose of it to his neighbour none the worse for wear.

NEW NAMES FOR STREETS.—As much injury is liable to be inflicted upon tradesmen by any alteration of the names of their respective streets, a correspondent suggests that wherever such alteration takes place, the old name of the street should be written up under the new one.